

Minutes of the North Carolina Charter Schools Review Board

Rm. 755 – In Person, Department of Public Instruction

September 8, 2026

9 AM

Attendance – CSRБ Members	
Jeremy Wall (nonvoting) Dr. Rita Haire - Absent Dr. John Eldridge Gerald McNair - Remote Hilda Parlér Dr. Shelly Shope	Eric Sanchez Bruce Friend Lindalyn Kakadelis Todd Godbey Eric Guckian - Absent Stephen Gay
Attendance – Other	
<i>Office of Charter Schools</i> Ashley Baquero, Director Joseph Letterio, Consultant - Remote Melanie Rackley, Consultant Jenna Cook, Consultant Dr. Brandi Gill, Consultant Dr. Natasha Norins, Consultant Nicky Niewinski, Asst. Director Ansel Caceres, Consultant Julie Whetzel, Consultant	<i>Attorney</i> Steven Walker <i>Teacher/Principal of Year</i> TOY – Stephanie Lane POY - Deborah Brown

CSRБ YouTube Recording: [Day 1 - September NC Charter School Review Board - Sept. 8, 2026](#)

Call To Order

Pledge of Allegiance: Mr. Bruce Friend

Mission and Ethics Statement:

- Mission and Ethics Statement read by Bruce Friend
 - Eric Sanchez - recuse from Charlotte Lab
 - Dr. John Eldridge - recuse from Davidson Charter Academy

Approval of the Agenda and Minutes

Motion: Hilda Parlér moved to approve agenda for the September 2026 Meeting.

Second: Lindalyn Kakadelis

Vote: Unanimous

☒ Passed

☐ Failed

Motion: Lindalyn Kakadelis moved to approve June Regular and July Special Called meeting minutes

Second: Hilda Parlér

Vote: Unanimous

☒ Passed

☐ Failed

September Charter Schools Review Board Meeting

2026-2027 CSRБ Administrative Items: Mr. Bruce Friend, Chair

Approval of Meeting Schedule

Dialogue/Discussion Summary

- The board considered the meeting schedule for the next Charter Schools Review Board cycle.
- Ms. Logue stated that the proposed schedule was similar to schedules used in previous years.
- No concerns, objections, or requested revisions were raised before the vote.

Motion: Hilda Parlér moved to approve the 2027 CSRБ Meeting Calendar.

Second: Eric Sanchez

Vote: Unanimous

• ☒ Passed

☐ Failed

Election of Chair and Vice Chair

Dialogue/Discussion Summary

- Ms. Kakadelis praised the outgoing chair's service and nominated Dr. John Eldridge for chair, suggesting that he and Bruce Friend exchange leadership roles.
- No additional nominations or objections were recorded for chair.
- A board member nominated Bruce Friend for vice chair; another member expressed support for ensuring that he remained in a leadership role.
- Dr. John Eldridge thanked the board after his election and stated that he appreciated the opportunity to lead with Bruce Friend's continued assistance.

Motion: Lindalyn Kakadelis moved to approve Dr. John Eldridge as CSRБ Chair.

Second: Dr. Shelly Shope

Vote: Unanimous

- ☒ Passed ☐ Failed

Motion: Dr. John Eldridge moved to approve Bruce Friend as CSRБ Vice-Chair.

Second: Dr. Shelly Shope

Vote: Unanimous

- ☒ Passed ☐ Failed

Introduction of TOY and POY – Board Advisors: Dr. Natasha Norins, OCS Consultant

- Dr. Natasha Norins introduced Deborah Brown - Principal of the Year, and Stephanie Lane - Teacher of the Year as our new CSRБ Advisors.

Amendments: Ms. Julie Whetzel, OCS Consultant

Charlotte Lab School Mission Statement Amendment

Dialogue/Discussion Summary

- Ms. Whetzel presented Charlotte Lab School's request to revise its mission statement as a required action arising from the school's renewal process.
- The revised language more clearly described the school's educational model, including use of the community as a classroom and personalized, engaging, and authentic learning experiences.
- Ms. Whetzel reported that stakeholders had provided input and that all required documents had been submitted.
- No board questions, objections, or additional discussion were recorded.

Motion: Hilda Parlér moved to approve the mission statement for Charlotte Lab School.

Second: Bruce Friend

Vote: Unanimous - Eric Sanchez recused

- ☒ Passed ☐ Failed

Greystone Day School Mission Statement Amendment

Dialogue/Discussion Summary

- Ms. Whetzel presented Greystone Day School's request to revise its mission statement as part of the renewal process.
- The requested change was limited to updating the grade levels because the school had expanded beyond its original high-school-only configuration.
- Helen Nance was available online to answer questions, and board members congratulated her on her retirement.

- No substantive questions or objections were recorded.

Motion: Lindalyn Kakadelis moved to approve the mission statement for Gray Stone Day School.

Second: Todd Godbey

Vote: Unanimous

- ☒ Passed ☐ Failed

Shining Rock Classical Academy Mission Statement Amendment

Dialogue/Discussion Summary

- Ms. Whetzel presented Shining Rock Classical Academy's request to revise its mission statement as part of the renewal process.
- The revisions removed the former Challenge Foundation Academy language associated with a name change.
- The new mission added service to others as a core component and retained values including integrity, respect, compassion, responsibility, wisdom, and leadership.
- Ms. Whetzel reported that stakeholders had provided input and that the required documents had been submitted; no board objections were recorded.

Motion: Bruce Friend moved to approve the mission statement for Shining Rock Classical Academy.

Second: Dr. Shelly Shope

Vote: Unanimous

- ☒ Passed ☐ Failed

Davidson Charter Academy Educational Management Organization Agreement

Dialogue/Discussion Summary

- Davidson Charter Academy requested approval to contract with Tutelage School Solutions to address persistent leadership turnover, underenrollment, financial pressures, and academic performance. The school reported that it had returned from a D to a C performance grade and sought continued improvement.
- Ms. England and Ms. Whitaker emphasized the need for stable leadership and operational continuity. They stated that Tutelage would supplement the school's academic leadership with enrollment, finance, marketing, facilities, transportation, and organizational support.
- CSRБ questions addressed the breadth of Tutelage's authority, the multi-year agreement, termination costs, management fees, board autonomy, potential conflicts of interest, leadership succession, transportation, and access to free or reduced-price meals.

- Tutelage representatives stated that the local board would retain authority, that Tutelage would support rather than replace the school director, and that their existing schools participated in meal and transportation programs.
- During deliberation, one board member described Tutelage's model and conflict-of-interest safeguards favorably but expressed concern that the agreement ceded extensive operational control and could be financially difficult for the school to terminate.

Motion: Lindalyn Kakadelis moved to approve the EMO addition for Davidson Charter Academy.

Second: Shelly Shope

Vote: Unanimous - Dr. John Eldridge recused

- ☒ Passed ☐ Failed

NC Enrollment Landscape Analysis Review: Brian Eschbacker – Founder, Education Data Collective

Statewide Enrollment Landscape Analysis

Dialogue/Discussion Summary

- Mr. Eschbacker presented a statewide analysis combining population trends, births, migration, enrollment by school type, student demographics, and school quality at state, county, and local geographic levels.
- The presentation noted that declining national birth rates reduce incoming kindergarten cohorts, while migration into North Carolina is expected to support continued growth in the state's child population; county-level conditions vary substantially.
- Mr. Friend asked how cross-county charter attendance was represented and emphasized using localized demand and choice data when evaluating new applications. Mr. Eschbacker explained that enrollment was assigned according to campus location and that full-virtual charter enrollment was excluded from the geographic calculation.
- CSRБ members raised concerns about charter saturation, declining enrollment in some communities, school sustainability, and the need for stronger marketing and public education about charter-school options. Mr. Sanchez requested additional information concerning private-school and scholarship-program enrollment.
- CSRБ members suggested that applicants and existing schools use the data to test demand, understand competition, develop marketing plans, and identify areas where charter options may be viable. A statewide public-awareness campaign and outreach to prekindergarten families were also suggested.

Introduction to 2026 Charter Application Interviews: Ms. Melanie Rackley, OCS Consultant

Charter Application Cycle and Interview Process Update

Dialogue/Discussion Summary

- Ms. Rackley reviewed the statutory authority of the board, applicants' opportunity to correct completeness issues, and the State Board of Education appeal process.
- First-round interviews for the current application cycle would run from September through December, with January reserved for any second-round interviews.
- The cohort included one accelerated applicant, an applicant proposing a management organization, and a proposed statewide virtual school. Enrollment feasibility, facility readiness, management-organization capacity and transparency, board autonomy, and required virtual-school positions as key review considerations.
- Each application had three evaluators, including an Office of Charter Schools staff member, with additional review from exceptional-children and multilingual-program staff.
- CSRБ options after an interview were described as approval for the Ready to Open process, denial, or a second interview with requested supplemental documentation.

Darden Perry Academy Accelerated Charter Application

Dialogue/Discussion Summary

- Darden Perry Academy proposed an accelerated-opening dual-language program involving English and American Sign Language. The applicant cited strong interest in the concept and a desire to serve deaf, hard-of-hearing, and hearing students who could benefit from visual language instruction.
- CSRБ members expressed support for the innovative concept and the population to be served but questioned whether the application was sufficiently developed for an accelerated timeline.
- Major concerns included the unresolved facility zoning and educational-occupancy process, uncertainty about local demand, the geographic distribution of interested families, transportation, enrollment assumptions, and inconsistencies or omissions in the budget.
- The applicant stated that planning commission and town council proceedings were expected in October and November, that philanthropic support was awaiting approval, and that losing time could result in losing the proposed building.
- During deliberation, CSRБ members stated that the proposal might merit further consideration on a standard timeline but did not provide sufficient certainty for accelerated approval. One member asked whether the matter could be tabled; staff clarified that the board could approve, deny, or request a second interview.

Motion: Lindalyn Kakadelis moved to NOT approve the accelerated charter application for Darden-Perry Academy because it did not meet the parameters of an accelerated application and had too many unresolved matters .

Second: Hilda Parlér

Vote: 7:1 - Yes: BF, HP, TG, ES, SS, JE, LK No: SG

- ☒ Passed ☐ Failed

Encompass Montessori Charter Application

Dialogue/Discussion Summary

- Encompass Montessori returned after a prior unsuccessful application and proposed opening a public Montessori charter school in Wake County.
- The applicant emphasized equitable access to Montessori education, a weighted lottery, community demand, organizational partnerships, and plans to participate in the National School Lunch Program.
- CSRБ questions addressed governance independence, leadership recruitment, facilities, food service, transportation, teacher preparation, student demographics, and the completeness of the budget.
- During deliberation, Dr. Eldridge and other members recognized continuing budget work, especially costs associated with the target population, but stated that the applicant had shown substantial growth and had capable support for the Ready to Open phase.
- CSRБ members emphasized that advancement to Ready to Open was not a guarantee of opening and praised the applicant for strengthening the proposal after the previous denial.

Motion: Eric Sanchez moved to approve the charter application for Encompass Montessori.

Second: Lindalyn Kakadelis

Vote: Unanimous

- ☒ Passed ☐ Failed

Board Policy and Strategic Work Sessions

Dialogue/Discussion Summary

- Mr. Godby proposed setting aside intentional board time for policy, impact, trend analysis, and strategic work in addition to application, renewal, and compliance decisions.
- Dr. Shope supported adding policy-focused work and suggested that a two-day format could separate school matters from broader policy responsibilities.
- Dr. Eldridge reported that he had requested outside proposals concerning improvements to the board's processes and planned to circulate them for member review.
- CSRБ members discussed a future working session, potentially beginning with an October discussion, to examine application processes, low-performing schools, school support, legislation, and policy development.
- CSRБ generally supported incorporating policy and strategic planning into future agendas; no formal action was taken.

Supporting Quality for Students in NC Remote Charter Academies: Early Findings and a Phased Path Forward: Dr. Robert Markle, Research and Evaluation Specialist & Dr. Crystal Rentz, Senior Director; Safal Partners

Dialogue/Discussion Summary

- Ms. Dillingham introduced research intended to define and evaluate quality in remote charter academies. The project was developing an implementation guide, a quality-indicators rubric, and a monitoring approach aligned with the board's existing performance framework.
- Presenters reported that the work drew on research, national standards, stakeholder interviews, and surveys. Proposed quality indicators included adult presence, student belonging, learner-centered instruction, engagement, intake assessment, and leading indicators that permit intervention before final performance results.
- The presenters reported performance data for five remote charter academies, including that three of five were low-performing and one of five met growth, while noting the small sample size and improvement by every remote charter academy. They also discussed economically disadvantaged enrollment and the limits of student demographics as an explanation for performance differences.
- Mr. Gay objected to automatic five-year renewals for remote academies when brick-and-mortar schools face more stringent criteria. Other members stressed that standards must protect instructional quality while accounting for differences among fully virtual, blended, statewide, and mission-specific models.
- CSRБ members requested evidence-based, practical indicators for student engagement, progress monitoring, tiered intervention, and accountability. They supported piloting the rubric as both a monitoring and school-support tool before the first remote charter renewals.

Meeting Adjourned:

2:45 pm